

# Hope, faith and love

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[ 0 : 00 ] Today we will be looking at the fundamentals of the Christian life, that being hope, faith and love. Later in July we will look again at the Christian in the world.

And finally we will look at the Christian in the church. Three studies in 1 Peter. Peter is writing to a group of believers in Asia Minor, largely in Turkey.

And he writes to people, some Jewish, some who have been called out of paganism, to encourage them. And he reminds them in chapter 1 verse 8 that once they were idolaters, 1 verse 18 excuse me, he reminds them that they were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers. The worshippers of sticks and stones who had come to faith in the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And he reminds them that having come to faith in him, they had been set apart from the immorality of the pagan world.

Chapter 4 verse 3 he says, The time is passed for doing what the Gentiles want to do. Living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties.

[ 1 : 24 ] Instead of selfish lives, they were living selfless lives. Called out of idolatry, set apart from immorality. And as a result of that, they become very unpopular.

It's always unpopular to live a counter-cultural life. To stand apart from the world. And to speak out against the world. That's precisely what the Christians had found themselves doing.

And so as we read his letter, we learn in chapter 3 verse 9, they were being reviled. People were talking about them behind their backs. And slandering them to their faces.

We learn that they were suffering discrimination in the workplace. Chapter 2 verse 20. And beyond. They were being persecuted only for their faith in Christ.

They were being slandered just because they were different, because of their faith in Christ. And that caused them a problem. Because they said, how are we to respond?

[ 2 : 26 ] And how are we to conduct ourselves in a world which is hostile to our Lord? The natural tendency, of course, is to take revenge, isn't it? To talk back.

To fight back. And the easiest thing in the world would be for them just to stop. To go back to the pagan temples. To go back to the drinking parties. And to become like everyone else.

Like the dead fish swimming with the tide. And so Peter tells us in chapter 5 verse 12 why he is writing. He says, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in it. He writes to remind them of the grace of God. To exhort them to stand firm in God's grace. Not to go back to their idolatrous, immoral ways.

And in the first 12 chapters he writes to give them a sense of perspective of their situation. They were facing huge difficulties. But he wants to set them in the perspective of eternity.

[ 3 : 33 ] And he does so in 12 verses which we want to look at under three headings. Firstly, the promise of a permanent hope. Secondly, the temporary trials of their faith and love.

Thirdly, the prediction and path of the Messiah. One of the great joys of having this new building is that people come in and speak to us.

And they are often very willing to speak to us about faith. And on Thursday, Andy and myself were just about to close up. And as often happens, somebody came into the building and looked around. Intelligent, well-educated lady from Asia. And we said, are you a Christian? Very good question to ask. And she said, oh no, no, I don't believe anything at all.

And we said, well can we tell you what we believe? Which is also a very good question to ask. And she said, okay, tell me what you believe. So we began to explain our hope. And we said that we believe one day Christ will return.

[ 4 : 34 ] And that evil will be judged. We believe that wars will cease across the face of the earth. That death will be swallowed up in victory. We believe that God will one day recreate the world in righteousness.

And we will live in that world with resurrection bodies. And we will enjoy unbroken, unending fellowship with God and his people. She was almost in shock.

She said, that is too much hope. It's very refreshing, isn't it, when we see the gospel through the eyes of others. And Peter writes to remind the Christians of their hope.

And he says four things. First of all, verse 3, it is a living hope. It is based upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. A resurrection which Peter witnessed.

It is a hope of life in a world that is surrounded and lurking in the shadows of death. That those who have faith in Christ will share in his resurrection one day.

[ 5 : 38 ] Chapter 4, it is a permanent hope. He describes it as an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, unfading. You see, everything really is temporary, isn't it?

As I walked to work on Tuesday, I passed a really lovely Ferrari parked in the street. And I looked at it and I thought, what a lovely car. Wouldn't it be nice to have one of them in the drive?

But I thought, actually, in a few years, it will be on a scrap heap. That night as I went home, I bought some flowers for Helen. I don't do it every night, but it's appreciated when I do.

And she said, what lovely flowers. But the truth is, in 10 days' time, they will be in the bin. A friend came over from medical school and we were catching up.

We were talking about who'd married who and how careers were progressing. And I thought to myself, every marriage will end in divorce or death. Every career will end in retirement or redundancy.

[ 6 : 38 ] It's all temporary. Is there anything which lasts? And Peter says, you have an inheritance, imperishable, undefiled, unfaded. You have something permanent as Christians.

A living hope. A permanent hope. And a future hope, verse 4. It is kept in heaven for you. Verse 5. It is to be revealed in the last time.

I read a list of the top-selling Christian books of 2008 from America. And it's a very interesting list.

One book, The Secret to True Happiness, sold almost 200,000 copies. There are other books about money, about aging, about family, important things.

Perhaps one of the best-selling books was called Become a Better You. Seven Tips to Living a Full Life Now. From the same author of a book called Your Best Life Now.

[ 7 : 42 ] The husband of the person who wrote the third best-selling Christian book in America last year. Love Your Life. What did Christ say about people who loved their life?

It seems that in America, Christians are so preoccupied with the here and now. And wanting to have it all now that they've lost sight of the future hope. And they want heaven here and now.

It is to be revealed in the last time. And it is the hope which rests not on the power of men, verse 5, but on God's power. Which guards us through faith.

You see, the people Peter was writing to didn't wake up one morning and say, All this stuff we do in the pagan temples, it's all a bit strange, isn't it? Why don't we go to church and read the Bible with these Christians?

They hadn't taken the initiative. God had taken the initiative. He'd sent people to preach to them by the Holy Spirit. He had foreknown them. He'd chosen them. He'd given them new birth.

[ 8 : 47 ] God made the first move. And brought them to faith. And having called them, he would keep them by his power. Peter says, have faith in the power of God, not your own.

And they wouldn't have to look very far into the Old Testament to see that God's power and promise are sure. He promised the Israelites an inheritance, the land of Canaan. And as they entered that land, Joshua said to them, Not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised you.

Everything has come to pass. The inheritance depended upon the power and the promise of God. So they have a living hope. A permanent hope.

A future hope which rested upon the power and the promise of God. And having given them that perspective, he turns in verse 6 to their situation and says, for a little while, you have some trials.

He isn't belittling their problem. He doesn't say, stiff of her lip, telly-ho, it'll be alright in the morning. He says, for a little while, against the backdrop of a very long eternity, you have some trials.

[10:02] Is that our perspective? When we face difficulties and problems and opposition, do we rejoice? Because they will only last a little while.

Do we, like Paul, say, our light and our momentary troubles, compared with the eternal weight of glory? But of course it is difficult, so Peter writes to encourage them.

Verses 6 and 7. As I left church last week, actually, we were driving around George Square, and we heard a scream. Sometimes we hear screams in George Square, but this was different.

And we looked up and there was a crane. And at the end of a crane was a human being dangling on an elastic cord. And for some reason, people had begun bungee jumping in the middle of George Square.

And I asked Helen if she wanted to go, but, you know, we wanted to get home for lunch, so we kept driving. But I thought to myself, I was troubled all week. I thought, how do they know the elastic band is strong enough?

[11:04] The crane's very strong, isn't it? But, you know, it's a very thin elastic band. So I went on the internet, and I looked up the British Elastic Rope Association bearer, and I phoned them up, and I said, how are you sure that this is going to work?

And the man said, it's very simple. What we do at the start of the day is we take some sandbags, we tie that to the elastic cord, we throw them off, and if the cord doesn't snap, we're happy for the day. We test it to see if it's strong enough to hold.

What is the purpose of these trials? Verse 7, so that the tested genuineness of your faith God tests people's faith to ensure that it is strong enough to unite them savingly to Christ, to ensure that it is genuine, like gold refined in the fire, that it is sufficient to unite them to the Saviour.

And it's always a test, isn't it? It's very easy to be a Christian just now, sitting in church, singing hymns, praying prayers. Is it quite as easy on a Thursday lunchtime in the staff room when the conversation takes a very worldly edge?

Is it quite as easy on the staff night out when the conversation turns to Christ and his people and the heckles are raised and people begin to say very unkind things against Christians? And it is a test of our faith and our priorities when we are called to suffer for Christ, when people begin to speak against us.

[12:39] Is the praise of God more important than the praise of men? When we risk loss, missing out on a promotion, losing a job because of our stance, is our treasure in heaven of greater worth than the treasures we're offered on earth?

Do we believe that we have better and lasting possessions? When our brothers and sisters in other lands are faced with martyrdom, is their life eternal of greater worth than their life here and now?

In times of trial, would our faith, is our faith, proven genuine? You see, because for Peter, faith wasn't simply in a sense of some intellectual beliefs.

He says, though you have not seen him, you believe in him and you love him. Faith is a relationship with the living Christ. They have not seen him but they believe in him through the preached word and they love him and are united with him in a covenant.

And the validity of our love is seen in times of difficulty. I remember before I was married, I was having dinner with a friend at university and he said, before you marry, there are two questions you must answer.

[13:56] There's actually a few more but he gave me two. Is this person the person I would most want to eat a bowl of pasta with in the whole world? And does this person love Christ enough to suffer for him?

Well, one man who loved Christ enough to suffer for him was called Charles Simeon. You may know him. He was a 19th century preacher in Cambridge. He was converted and he got very excited and he began to tell people about his hope and open the scriptures with them and as he did, persecution rose against him from within Cambridge University.

Students would stand outside the churches where he was preaching. Sometimes they would burst in and cause a riot so that he couldn't continue. On one occasion they tried to mug him afterwards. His colleagues were against him. One fellow of the university would organise his Greek lectures at the same time as Simeon's sermons so that the students would have to attend their class instead of going to church.

His own congregation or some of his congregation were against him. For twelve years he was not permitted to preach in the evening and other men were invited to preach in his place.

[15:12] They would lock the doors outside the church to keep him from entering and preaching. Simeon faced tremendous opposition and when he was seventy-one years old having ministered for forty-nine years somebody said to him how do you cope?

And he said this my dear brother we must not mind a little suffering for Christ's sake. When I am getting through a hedge if my head and shoulders are safely through I can bear the pricking of my legs.

Let us rejoice in the remembrance that our holy head has surmounted all his suffering. And triumphed over death. Let us follow him patiently. We shall soon be partakers of his victory. Simeon loved Christ enough to suffer for him because he had the perspective of eternity. And he knew that his trials would last just a little while. Well of course it hasn't gone away has it? Difficulty and persecution. And this week quite astonishing two things I learned. The Christian Institute who I commend to you sent an email around about an evangelical minister who was questioned by five police officers for doing nothing more than handing out invitations to an Easter service.

[16:28] Somebody objected that Christians were proselytizing in the street. I learned this morning of a booklet called Religion or Belief a practical guide for the NHS which seeks to clarify whether doctors and nurses should share their faith with their patients.

Can I encourage you if you're a doctor and nurse to do just that? But this booklet says this Members of some religions are expected to preach and to try to convert other people and those from other religions or beliefs.

They could feel harassed and intimidated by this behaviour. To avoid misunderstanding and complaints it should be made clear to everyone on the first day of training and regularly restated that such behaviour notwithstanding religious beliefs could be construed as harassment under the disciplinary and grievance procedures.

A Christian nurse doctor or midwife could be considered to harass a patient because they offer to pray with them or to share with them the hope that they have. difficult days not far away.

Will our faith prove genuine when tested? Will our first loyalty be to Christ and obedience to him? But of course Peter says finally that they shouldn't be surprised.

[17:56] He reminds them of the path and the predictions of the Messiah. He says in chapter 4 verse 12 Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Don't be surprised he said because what you experience is precisely what Christ experienced.

the believers were chosen by God and rejected by men so was Christ he says. The believers were suffering for righteousness so did Christ he says.

Do not be surprised when it comes upon you. And he says in verse 11 that it was prophesied this is the path the Messiah would tread. They were looking for the person or time the spirit of Christ was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

You see the Old Testament believers looked forward to a Messiah. They looked forward to someone who would come and fulfil God's purpose. And they had several portraits throughout the Old Testament writings of this Messiah.

[19:23] And one of them was of a suffering servant who put the needs of others before his own. And in Isaiah chapter 53 we read of one who was rejected by men despised by them and who suffered not for his own sins for he had none but for the sins of others and through whose suffering forgiveness could be offered.

And the early Christians in Peter apply this directly to Christ. Chapter 2 verse 13 to 25 he quotes from Isaiah 53 and he alludes to Isaiah 53 and says this is the one the suffering servant sent by God to die for sins the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.

Very different form of leadership isn't it from what we see in our own government. Selfless leadership of Christ compared to the selfish leadership of some of our MPs with their hands in the till to clean their moats and to build houses for their ducks in their private islands.

the suffering servant. But there was another picture of the Messiah and the Jewish people looked forward to the coming of a wonderful king who would rule in righteousness and justice and who

would have a kingdom that was permanent that was everlasting.

And time and again in the scriptures we're given a portrait perhaps nowhere more clearly than Daniel chapter 7 where we are told of one like a son of man and to whom was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples nations and languages should serve him.

[ 21 : 03 ] His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Peter understands that after his suffering Christ was taken up into glory.

And in chapter 3 verse 22 he says Christ has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels authorities and powers having been subjected to him.

The suffering servant and the glorious Messiah ruling over the eternal kingdom. These two pictures combined in Christ who suffered and was glorified.

Peter says that is the sequence and order that you should expect. suffering now glory later. So what are they to do and what are we to do in the midst of that environment?

Well he's just told us do not be surprised expect difficulty expect opposition expect persecution.

These people verse 1 of chapter 1 were exiles.

[ 22 : 13 ] This world was not their home. They were passing through and some of the people in the world would of course show them hostility. They were to rejoice in it.

Chapter 4 verse 14 Rejoice. Why? Because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you because you're identified with Christ. What a wonderful thing to rejoice in.

You share his sufferings now and you will share his glory when it is revealed. Thirdly they were to commit themselves to God. They were not to retaliate.

It's the easiest thing in the world isn't it? To want to fight back but Christ didn't fight back. Chapter 2 verse 23 When he was reviled he did not revile in return.

When he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

How should the believers behave exactly the same?

[ 23 : 15 ] Chapter 4 verse 19 Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. That must have been a very difficult lesson for Peter to learn mustn't it?

You remember what he did when he faced persecution and he drew that sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. But he learned from Christ's example to give himself to God not to take up arms but to bless those who persecuted him.

And finally to continue to offer that hope to others you see these were pagan idolaters who lived in immorality and people had loved them enough to preach Christ to them and they'd been saved and cleansed and sanctified.

And Peter says always be willing to share that hope set apart Christ as Lord and be willing chapter 3 verse 15 to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

And if you want to practice doing that sign up for the building evangelism rota and you can practice it on a daily basis. Continue offering Christ to your persecutors continue praying for them and inviting them into his eternal kingdom and offering them a share in that permanent inheritance.

[ 24 : 32 ] expect suffering rejoice in suffering because you will share in Christ's glory commit yourselves to God and continue to offer Christ and the salvation he offers to those who persecute you and speak against you.

Well Peter wrote about the grace of God didn't he? We need to hear about the grace of God we need to understand it and we need to be gracious ourselves if we are to offer that to others.

Let's pray. Father we thank you that you have given us new birth into a living hope.

We thank you Lord that you are so honest with us that we will face trials of many kinds that we will experience suffering but you promise us Lord glory when Christ is revealed we pray that your grace might be upon each of our lives not only today but in the six days which follow that we might stand firm that we might be guarded by your power as we wait for the return of our Lord and Savior and we pray this in his name Amen